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ABSTRACT

The intent of this discussion is to briefly (1) examine the history of child development as an area of specialized study in India; (2) describe how the program of studies offered by the Department of Child Development at the M. S. University of Baroda reflects increasing social demands and pressures for greater involvement of social scientists in development programs and social policy making; (3) identify the current standing and future prospects of professional child development workers; and (4) project the readiness of the department to become a Center for Advanced Studies in Child Development and Early Childhood Education, with special emphasis on issues related to developing societies. (Author/RH)

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CENTER FOR STUDIES IN CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION : FOCUS ON ISSUES AND CONCERNS OF DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

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ABSTRACT

The present paper purports to briefly: (a) examine the history of Child Development as an area of specialized study in India, (b) describe how the program of studies offered by the Department of Child Development at the M.S. University of Baroda reflects the increasing social demands and pressures for greater involvement of social scientists in development programs and social policy making, (c) identify the current standing and future prospects of professional child development workers, and (d) project the readiness of the department to assume the responsibility of becoming a Center for Advanced Studies in Child Development and Early Childhood Education with special emphasis on issues related to developing societies.

The field of child development in India falls within the purview of Home Science, unlike in the West wherein it is predominantly within the domain of Psychology and Education. Child Development in India, which had its origin in training home-makers for efficient mother-craft, has over the years assumed an inter-disciplinary character merging practical work with basic and action research, and has come to broadly represent a loose cluster of subject areas, namely, Human Development, Early Childhood Education, Family Studies, and Child and Family Welfare. Such an inter-disciplinary outlook has been a significant source of its fertilization as well as progress.

The broadening of the goals and scope of Child Development has been in response to a variety of social demands and pressures. Significant among these are:

° social pressures from government and voluntary agencies drawing on the available expertise of child development specialists to promote better policies and practices for improving the health, the rearing, and education of children:

° academic pressures for developing theories that are culturally relevant and useful, and not empirical studies of the discipline that can provide the basis for knowledge about development;

° pressures from funding agencies to extend the application of research based knowledge to the fields of health, education, and child rearing, leading to the involvement of child development researchers in intervention and social change.

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The Department of Child Development at the M.S. University of Baroda

The Department of Child Development at the M.S. University of Baroda has been a pioneering institute in the field in this country, and reflects to a great extent the general trends of development described in the earlier section. Since its inception in 1955, starting with the nucleus of a laboratory nursery school, the Department now offers five major programs of study, namely, an under-graduate diploma in child development (training para-professional workers); a post-graduate diploma in early childhood education (training pre-school teachers); a bachelor's program with a major in child development (preparing a cader of middle level workers for various national programs and child welfare services); a masters program in child development (preparing supervisory and administrative staff for child development programs and as personnel for various child development departments and colleges; and a doctoral program (to train higher level university teachers and researchers). A second masters program in early childhood education is on the anvil.

In recent years particular interest has been evinced by visiting scholars both Indian and foreign, in the department's involvement in intervention programs for the improvement of the environment of children and their families from the disadvantaged sections of the community. The department has been actively engaged in design, implementation, and evaluation of intervention

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programs for disadvantaged children and parents. Covering a range of activities that are remedial, supportive, and/or promotive in nature, the intervention programs include:

° compensatory early intervention including pre-natal care and education of mothers, assessment of infants to identify maladaptive development and offer remedial services, and home-based intervention programs (especially with mothers).

° intervention in the pre-school/primary school settings, planning and developing curriculum, promoting teacher competencies through in-service training and refresher courses;

° combined intervention in the home and school setting;

° ecological intervention particularly in the provision and utilization of services for women and children in tribal and rural settings;

° remedial intervention to promote adequate development of handicapped and retarded children.

Assessment of the department's contribution to training and research in child development.

As in the lives of individuals, there comes a time in the life of a department which has completed nearly three decades of existence, to introspect, take stock, assess the gains and losses, achievements and failures, and to then plan the future directions and strategies for achieving the same. In the last two years, three major aspects of the department's program have been subjected to careful scrutiny and assessment. These include:

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1. Research. An overview of researches conducted in the department since 1963 highlight primarily the marked shifts from (a) reliance on western models and methodology to increasingly those of adaptations and innovations that are culturally relevant; (b) theory-based, laboratory designed or causal-comparative basic researches to establish a knowledge base to an increasing choice of socially relevant and action-based or action-oriented researches. A compendium of researches conducted till 1981 have been edited and compiled in two volumes : Vol.1. Human development and Family studies, and Vol.2. Early childhood education and Family welfare, and is currently in press.

2. Practicum-Involvement in Community Development Programs. Assessment of this aspect relates to impact of intervention programs to date, scope for expansion of involvement, efficacy of training through field placement and problems related to co-ordination, evaluation, and feedback.

3. Curriculum - The Training Program. Perhaps the most ambitious among our efforts to take stock has been that of contacting our alumni of the past two and a half decades, to assess the employment pattern, and the perceived contribution of the training provided toward the job competencies required in the field. The feedback obtained herein is to be utilized for curriculum revision and enrichment.

A brief summary of some of the findings of the project related to the "child development curriculum and its relevance

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to job competencies required in the field, are presented here, as they serve to highlight the role of the child development worker on the professional scene. It serves to reiterate our introductory comments on the broadening goals and scope of Child Development in India.

Current and future job prospects of child development graduates.

A survey of job positions held by the child development graduates as well as interview responses of specialists in child development and allied disciplines regarding the efficacy of child development training programs revealed a broad spectrum of possibilities ranging from the stereotypic to the unusual. They include:

- as university teachers in post-graduate university departments and in affiliated colleges.
- as school teachers at the secondary, primary, and pre-school settings.
- as researchers in research institutes, university departments, and in international, national, and state level welfare organizations;
- as administrators, supervisors in various settings/agencies working with planning, implementation, and monitoring of basic services for children and their families;
- in welfare settings and in developmental projects as child welfare and probation/training/education officers at district and block levels; as extension workers in rural and tribal areas; in government departments, industries, and voluntary agencies;

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° in educational, recreational, and institutional settings, such as creche's and day-care centers, toy libraries, hobby centers, children's section in libraries, and children's recreation centers; balbhavans (children's play centers) and ghulka bhavans (youth play centers); as designers of children's play grounds and play equipments; as hostel wardens in public schools and other recreational institutions; in juvenile courts; and as educational advisors/co-ordinators in non-formal education programs for school dropouts and out-of-school youth organized during vacations.

° as trainers of para-professional workers, of local field workers, of teachers and of villagers (or local community members) in various action programs related to community development;

° in hospital settings working with the handicapped and exceptional children, with the chronically ill, in pre-natal and well-baby clinics, in pediatric wards, in mental health and other clinical settings and in public health services;

° as counsellors in public/municipal schools, in family and child-welfare programs, in hospitals and foster homes, and with emotionally disturbed adolescents, as well as newly married couples;

° as consultants in toy making industries, in television and other mass media/communications, (especially in programs for women and children), with engineering and architectural firms (in town planning, planning buildings, especially high rise

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apartment complexes, housing, institutions, play ground, creaches etc.); in schools (for administering psychological tests and for counselling); and in industries.

Besides the above wherein child development graduates have already made inroads, new possibilities are envisaged such as:

° authors/writers developing Indian literature (especially children's books); designing book jackets for children's books; preparing baby-care booklets for pharmaceutical firms; advertising for children's goods; as curators (in children's section in the museum)· as entrepreneurs manufacturing children's toys, clothes, foods, and equipment·

° self-employment prospects like starting nursery schools, child guidance clinics; centers for conducting workshops in creative drama; scripting for television and radio programs; producing and directing children's films; and in free-lance journalism especially with women's magazines.

While the career opportunities listed so far is primarily meant for graduates and higher degree holders in child development, clear roles have also been envisaged for a cader of para-professional workers in child development. Apart from catering to the existing need for teacher aides in school settings, and for trained assistants in welfare settings, it was opined that the para-professional training program offered by the department would also prepare: nursing aides to work in hospital and day care settings, and as mothers in SOS villages.

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A Center for Advanced Studies in Child Development and Early Childhood Education.

The job positions held by child development graduates in India and the career opportunities available to them reflect the broadening scope of Child Development in this country. With the increasing pressure for involvement in social intervention programs and social policy decisions, the option of an insular existence of teaching and research within the sanctum of the university setting has ceased to be. In this venture of expanding our horizons, the fact that the field is dominated predominantly by women (by virtue of its affiliation with Home Science) has been both a constraint and a blessing. A blessing because involvement in action programs appears easier for women with their greater sensitivities to the needs of women and children from the vulnerable sections of the society. Further, the less professionally competitive attitude of women enables them to view such a participation as meaningful rather than as a restraint on their publish or perish existence. The constraint has been in terms of inability to utilize to the maximum the job opportunities available because of the restrictions imposed by marriage as well as concerns of personal safety and "reputation" in a traditional setting in undertaking way-out jobs!

The nature of the program offered by the Department of Child Development at the M.S. University of Baroda, and the kind of career opportunities available to its graduates reflect to a

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considerable extent the nature of the development of the field of child development in India. With its team of eighteen faculty members with specialization in the four major areas of study, namely, human development, family studies, early childhood education, and family and child welfare, the available laboratory facilities and an extensive network of involvement in community development programs, the department is poised to assume the roles and responsibilities of becoming a Center for Advanced Studies in Child Development and Early Childhood Education in the Developing Societies. It is envisaged that such a Center would serve to strengthen and extend the facilities for exchange and collaboration among scholars, both within and outside the country, interested in working on critical issues pertaining to Child Development in developing countries.

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